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United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

May 14, 1985

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MEMORANDUM TO THE FILES

FROM: INM/P - John McLaughlin JMc

SUBJECT: Trip Report - Colombia May 8-11, 1985

SUMMARY

INM/P Global Support Division Chief Bob Richmond and I visited Colombia last week to provide Mr. Richmond with an orientation for the aviation program in that country and to provide the NAU with the current status and planning for the INM Thrush project. Additionally, we intended to obtain the NAU's plan for aviation eradication and equipment deployment. Two primary observations emerged as a result of our visit: it appears that the aerial eradication concept, both against marijuana and coca, has been established firmly in the GOC's program to control drug production; and, that the aviation program is being thoroughly integrated into the National Police structure.

Aerial Eradication

In the past several years, I have visited Colombia on numerous occasions - usually during the primary planting/harvesting season. The principle marijuana cultivation area in Colombia has historically been located in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta area. Specifically, thousands of hectares have always been found under some state of cultivation or harvesting in the Reserva or Rio Frio area of Santa Marta. During an extensive recon flight on this trip I found no evidence of significant marijuana cultivation. We flew over several of the areas which had recently been reconed by DEA, and I observed even less cultivation than has been reported recently by DEA's observer [redacted] STAT Additionally, there were very few compesinos in the area - a fact which would tend to verify that significant marijuana production in the Santa Marta area may not take place this year. The cultivators may have moved to other areas or returned to more traditional income generating work. Marijuana movement would have to be determined by extensive additional reconnaissance. Nevertheless, it is not not likely that historical production levels could be maintained while undertaking such a major relocation of production support and people.

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The NAU estimates that some 3,000 hectares were eradicated last season during the test project. The project began early last July and ended shortly after the beginning of the year. The Thrush on loan from INM was in country for approximately two months of this time and accounted for about 1,000 hectares of the acreage eradicated. The National Police and NAU believe the the growers are now in a "wait and see" posture with regard to additional spraying. The National Police are maintaining a continuous helicopter presence in the primary Santa Marta area.

Dr. Pete Jacoby, Texas A&M herbicide specialist, was in Bogota during our visit and preparing to depart for the Llanos. During my conversations with Jacoby, I briefed him on the status of our Thrush project development and the TVB (spray boom) operating procedures. Jacoby believes, and I agree, that he will be able to develop a herbicide to eradicate the coca bush. (It is generally accepted that this herbicide will have to be handled within the EPA labeling parameters and the field results carefully monitored.) National Police officers informed us that they have already successfully killed the coca bush utilizing two repetitions of the chemicals and at very high gallons per acre rates. These rates appear to run from 40 to 60 gallons per acre. Obviously, even with the load delivery capability of the Thrush aircraft, a rate of 60 gallons per acre could have serious consequences for the effectiveness of our spray program in Llanos. If such a rate were required on a full programmatic basis, INM would have to consider the use of larger multi-engine aircraft with significantly increased load carrying capacity. It should be noted that the use of such aircraft would be possible in the Llanos - a large extensive plane area without significant terrain obstructions and with sea level altitudes prevailing. Nevertheless, Jacoby believes that he will be able to identify chemicals and a technique which will effectively operate at a rate of 4 to 5 gallons per acre.

Institutionalizing the Aviation Program

The GOC is rapidly and effectively institutionalizing the aviation program within the National Police. Approximately two years ago National Police aviation assets consisted of about five confiscated aircraft and three pilots. Operations were staged out of the Bogota area where the aircraft also received very limited ad hoc maintenance. Since that time, the National Police aviation program has been expanded along the following lines:

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A. Aircraft deployment

Guymaral Airport
1-Beech C99, 2 Bell 206 L's, 1 Hughes helicopter, 1 Cessna 310, 1 Cessna 211, 2 Cessna 206, 1 Bell 206 L3.

San Jose
1 Twin Ottor, 2 Bell 212 helicopters, 1 Bell 206 L3, 1 Cessna 206 (presently attached to Villavicencio)

Laticia/Port Assis
1 Bell 212 helicopter, 1 Bell 206 L3 helicopter.

Santa Marta/Valledupar/Rioahcha
3 Bell 206 L's, 1 Cessna 206.

Apartado
In two weeks the following aircrafts should be deployed to this location: 1 Bell 212 from Bogota which is presently "floating", 1 Bell 206 L3 (presently being delivered from Forth Worth)

B. Maintenance: The primary maintenance base for the National Police is established at Guymaral Airport. Maintenance capability has nearly arrived at the capacity to perform all major inspections and to correct minor and major discrepancies. The National Police will continue to rely on outside help for engine and major component overhaul such as transmissions and gear boxes. The following represents the general disposition of capital investment funds for the maintenance project.

1. Major maintenance hanger and building $250,000 (includes ramps, parts room and shop works)

2. $200,000 has been allocated for a new building adjacent to the principle maintenance hanger. This building will house operations, administration, ground, flight, maintenance schools, and a warehouse.

3. $120,000 - special tools and test equipment

4. Parts and components investment. Overall inventory is evaluated at $1,250,000, of which $400,000 is in repair or overhaul. National Police are presently procuring an additional $800,000 in parts. Adkins estimates that a $2,500,000 inventory would be required in parts and components to sustain aircraft on hand. This inventory value is estimated on the basis of 1,000 flight hours per aircraft per year.

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C. Personnel:

Col. Jaime Ramariez, SANU Commander is now finishing his second full year in his present assignment. SANU assignments usually run for one year. Col. Ramariez has been a principle driving force behind the anti narcotics effort and it is not known whether he will be extended for a third year.

Lt. Col. Pulido commands the National Police Air Services. Col. Pluido does not have an aviation background but appears to be a tough administrator. He has completed eighteen years of national police service and is an officer whose career seems to be advancing rapidly. Col. Pulido was well versed in all aspects of a highly technical program - aspects including maintenance, funding, personnel, operations, aircraft deployment, and budget. Col. Pulido is a forward planner.

National Police Personnel Assignments. Presently, eighty-six personnel are assigned to the aero services. Ninety percent of these people were assigned during the past year. Col. Pulido states that he is in the process of recruiting forty-six additional personnel. This recruitment should be completed by the end of August. Additional recruitments will include five fixed-wing pilots, eight rotary wing pilots, seventeen specialist and technicians, and two avionics types. The balance of the forty-six would include administrative and logistics personnel. The current civilian contractor provides twenty-nine line and staff personnel. These personnel have been used to support the SANU during the aviation start up project and plans are in effect to replace them with National Police direct hire personnel. Col. Pulido intends to replace the twenty-nine (civilian) contractor personnel by the end of August. Twenty of the existing contractor personnel will be contracted directly by Fondorotatorio (the GOC agency which is equivalent to our GSA). Nine of the twenty-nine personnel will be dropped from the aviation project. The nine terminated individuals consist of six Bell 212 co-pilots and three Bell 206 aircraft commanders. The "direct hire" positions will be funded thorough the Fondorotatorio by USG contribution. In addition to moving the air group to a more self sufficient status, the foregoing personnel changes and direct contracting should result in personnel cost decreases from $70,000 to $40,000 a month. Finally, Col. Pulido stressed to us at the end of our visit that he intends to train National Police pilots at the AYRES factory course to replace the Thrush contract pilots.

I believe that the National Police Air Group is moving rapidly toward self sufficiency. Under the hard driving direction of Col. Ramariez and Col. Pulido, the National Police appear to be absorbing our aviation technology transfer quickly

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and efficiently. Morale throughout the Air Group is excellent and the National Police are enthused and determined.

Other Items

A. Cessna 152. Col. Pulido requested that a Cessna 152 be provided the National Police as a basic fix wing trainer. Costs are estimated at approximately $58,000 fully equipped. This aircraft would also serve the dual purpose of flying recon missions. Use of this machine would replace the operation of more expensive and heavier Cherokee aircraft. Further, use of Cessna would standardize basic fixed-wing training around Cessna aircraft which are presently in the inventory.

B. Centralized procurement. Adkins continues to experience difficult and time consuming procurement problems. He estimates that more than one half of his time is involved in procurement and he states that he needs centralized procurement to provide some relief. Procurement through the existing INM system (OPR/GSA) can be cumbersome and time consuming. One illustration of this concerns a $42,000 spare parts order for Bell 206 L models. These parts were ordered last June--firm delivery dates have yet to be established. Consequently, the L models have been grounded on several occasions for lack of spare parts. By the time full delivery is completed, inflation will likely have increased costs from the original $42,000 bid to $50,000. According to Adkins, the situation is further complicated when OPR ordered some of the parts from sources that were not able to provide or perform. Adkins now has a another $250,000 parts order ready but would rather receive the delegation from OPR to do their own ordering rather than go through that office. We can expect a cable on this matter.

C. Meetings with Senior National Police Officers. A forty minute call was made on General Delgado, National Police Director General. During this call Gen. Delgado expressed appreciation to the INM Assistant Secretary for INM's provision of the Beach 99 for National Police use. The status of the narcotics control program was then discussed in general terms. General Delgado, as usual, appeared enthusiastic and committed to the program. He also expressed appreciation for his Executive Observation Program. During the course of this meeting, Gen. Delgado stressed the importance of identifying a chemical able to kill the coca bush. He appears ready to move forward with a full coca eradication program.

Gen. Delgado also mentioned that, on May 8, one of his police units ambushed an M 19 group and captured 3 members of

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this insurgency. Of particular significance, Gen. Delgado pointed out that these three M 19 members had in their possession unit insignia from a Cuba located military training school.

After reviewing his coca eradication plan, Col. Ramariez asked that we assist him in dealing with DEA Washington for further reconnaissance support. Col. Ramariez stated that he is using an "expanding ring" technique for lab destruction in the Llanos. As his police units have made progress in destroying labs, the logistic burden has become more difficult and has spread over larger and larger areas. Consequently, they are experiencing recon and logistics constraints. Further, as the lab destruction mission is growing more successful, the labs are becoming more difficult to find. He hopes that the special equipped DEA turbo Aero Commander aircraft would be able to assist in this reconnaissance mission. Ramariez stated that DEA Bogota is having difficulty receiving approval though DEA headquarters Washington in this regard. As he understood it, DEA Washington had reservations about the capability of aircraft performance at Bogota citing high altitude and short run way as constraints. Upon our return to Washington, Col. Ramariez's assistance request was made to Mr. Frank Monostero, DEA. Mr. Monostero states that the problem does not involve aircraft performance, but that the mission requires night operation from a field that is not equipped for night flying. I mentioned to Mr. Monastero that we might consider using Apiay, a Colombian Airforce field located near Villavicecio (Llanos). This field should be capable of handing that operation. Mr. Monastero said his chief pilot is now in Colombia and he will have him investigate this possibility and will report the results back to INM when available.

Clearance: INM/P - Mr. Robert Richmond

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